News Item

Memes, Antisemitism, and The Press | Medium

By Susan McGregor
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Decades before the dawn of the consumer internet, evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins coined the term "meme" in his popular 1976 book *The Selfish Gene*. As Dawkins conceived it, a "meme" was essentially anything—from clothing styles to melodies—that was replicated across human groups *without* relying on actual genetic information. While present throughout human history, this newly-minted term for these "units of cultural information" captured the imagination of academics in a variety of disciplines. "Memetics", as the short-lived discipline was called—offered a novel way to think about how human culture propagated itself; for some, it even suggested a way to describe the organization of the human mind.

Though today memes are a ubiquitous feature of our ubiquitously-connected online lives, pre-internet "memes" rose to prominence especially during the 20th century, when they were almost exclusively artifacts of propaganda and the popular press. While not all memes are visual, many of their most enduring forms tend to be: as early as the 1920s, for example, the new technology of photography (aka the "flashlight") saw the creation of an illustrated version of the classic side-by-side image macro now known as the ["expectation vs. reality" meme](#):

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